

FEBRUARY 24, 2011 TESTIMONY BEFORE CGA GENERAL LAW COMMITTEE SUPPORTING HB 6337

My name is Michael Trahan and I am executive director of Solar Connecticut, Inc., a Higganum-based non-profit educational group promoting solar use in Connecticut and advancing the cause of our 70+ membership that includes full-time installers of solar photovoltaic (solar electric) and solar thermal (solar hot water) systems, full-time electricians and plumbers installing solar systems as a part of the business, and also architects, manufacturers, suppliers and distributors of solar products.

Regrettably, HB 6337 bill is necessary to affirm that solar workers may continue working with their fully licensed authority already sanctioned by the CGA and the Department of Consumer Protection as part of the state's five-year old photovoltaic, or "PV" license system. This authority was wrongly jeopardized due to a ruling initiated by the Department of Consumer Protection's volunteer electric work exam board. After more than five effective years grid-connecting solar systems without incident, the board acted to prohibit PV-1 contractors from this activity without cause. This ruling ignores legislative intent of the PV license and seeks to cut off an important service to state clean energy consumers that PV contractors have filled for five years.

I wish to make is clear solar installers are not here requesting to take work away from another license holder. But only to continue sharing this work with electricians who, for the most part, have shown little interest in. To us, this is a worker rights issue. The full confidence of the state Legislature and the Department of Consumer Protection were put into this license. Solar professionals worked hard to get this license and maximize its authority. It's been successful in driving employment in this state and creating one of the top 10 solar markets in America.

The idea behind the PV license was to create a dedicated workforce that would have the skill and the desire to install all kinds of solar PV products on all different types of roof lines and in all kinds of weather. Now, after years of effective, and by all accounts safe and quality installations, including connecting solar systems to service panels, an attempt is being made to change the rules. We've yet to be given a good reason for the electric work exam board's ruling other than exam board didn't know what PV license holders were doing for the past five years, that exam board members don't like the PV license, and that the fear exists that one day PV license holders somehow will grow the license to include traditional electrician's work such as wiring homes. Nothing could be further from the truth.

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Connecticut is not unique for allowing both electricians and solar professionals on rooftops to install solar systems. In fact, qualified four-year solar professionals who successfully pass a rigid exam have not only grid-connected solar systems in Connecticut, but have and continue to conduct all electric work on thousands of solar installations in top solar U.S. states just like Connecticut does.

In California, America's biggest solar market, and the third largest solar market in the world, solar installation professions who document four-years of on-the-job experience and pass an exam are today installing and connecting solar PV systems and have done so for years.

In Nevada, the top solar state in terms of installed solar per capita, if you can prove four years of solar installation service and pass a state exam, you can install and connect solar PV systems.

Not only have state licensing officials in other states judged experienced installers to be capable of this grid-connect work, a high-ranking licensing official within our own Department of Consumer Protection agrees (see March 2009 attached correspondence from DCP Occupational and Professional Licensing Division Director Richard Hurlburt). Almost two years ago, that DCP official determined that PV-1 contractors are not required to contract with a second electrical license holder to install a complete, working PV system.

We ask the committee to vote this bill to House floor and support it vigorously on behalf of Connecticut's clean energy workers.

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